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* True Intentions Differ on Electoral Reform

902B0160A Tokyo BUNGEI SHUNJU in Japanese Jul 90 pp 224-228—FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

[Article by Taro Akasaka: "What Is Prime Minister Kaifu Aiming At As He Suggests 'Political Reform'?"]

[Text] The standard of Japanese people when selecting whom to vote for is based upon the candidate's modesty, or open-heartedness, or whether he has had sake with the voter, or if he has given money to the voter, etc. Even if a small constituency system should be adopted, I do not think that the election trend is going to be a policy oriented one.

The Liberal Democratic Party (the LDP) political reform headquarters (chairman: Masayoshi Ito) and the Election System Investigation Council (the ESIC) (chairman: Hata) held a joint conference concerning the electoral system on 18 May. The council began a serious party adjustment toward a parallel system of a small constituency system and proportional representation system. The parallel system was submitted by a government committee.

A first year Diet member of the Abe faction revealed the true intentions of this faction from the beginning, criticizing a small constituency system.

A Diet member from Kagoshima Prefecture snapped, "In Kagoshima, people would elect one out of 450,000 but Iwate Prefecture, where Secretary General Ozawa is from, would elect one out of 350,000. Is this unfair?"

According to the ESIC report, the fixed number in the House of Representatives is 501, 301 from a small constituency and 200 from a proportional representation system. The proportion of the allotment for the two systems is 6 to 4. The general principles of the political reform submitted by the LDP last May stated that the party was going to adopt the fixed number 471 in accordance with the public election code. However, the ESIC report had some negativism toward the general principles of the political reform. There were some reasons for that negativism.

"If the fixed number is 471, then 60 percent of that is 282. It reduces the LDP's present 286 seats in the Diet. It means that some of the LDP's potential winners are going to fail in areas where a small constituency is adopted. The committee must have considered this aspect," (a leader of the LDP).

The ESIC tried to ease the expected LDP opposition. That is why the ESIC report is quite political.

In any case, Prime Minister Kaifu repeatedly mentioned the expression "conviction" and he boastfully said at a press conference, "I will risk my administration's life." He held the press conference in order to appeal directly to the public.

However, the LDP seemed cold to the plan. This was because the cabinet members felt their existence as politicians were endangered. They were fearful that they could lose their status if the present electoral system were to be changed.

The cold reaction is also due to Kaifu's obvious political intentions. "He is trying to use a political reform issue as a strategy to maintain his political power," (a leader of Abe faction).

Kaifu visited every LDP faction to ask for cooperation toward political reform, but in general the reaction was not favorable. Former Deputy Prime Minister Kanemaru of the Takeshita faction (now the head of the faction) was quite cool in spite of his support for Kaifu administration.

"I do understand the prime minister, but I can't accept the request simple-mindedly. Because this is such an important political issue, I would like to talk it over with my members. I would like to deal with it after I study the government's definitive plan."

However, Kanemaru spoke more straight-forwardly to his faction.

"I do not think reform of the electoral system can be acomplished. I will walk on my hands around the Imperial Palace, if it comes to pass."

The other leaders of the LDP factions also responded unfavorably toward Kaifu's request. Former Minister of Finance Miyazawa stated "I take the prime minister's decision seriously. I would like to inform my members at the general meeting." Former Chairman of the Political Affairs Research Council Watanabe stated "I am ready to cooperate, but if I do, it will be at the risk of my political life."

Komoto, an adviser to the Kaifu administration, kept a cautious attitude and said "The reform is all right, but thorough preparation is necessary. Before getting into a discussion with the opposition party, all the LDP members should agree on the issue."

The other faction leaders are cold as well, probably because they are aware of Kaifu's political intentions. A key person like Komoto is also cautious because he knows it is risky to stumble into the political reform issue in the present LDP environment.

Masayoshi Ito, the LDP political reform chairman, emphasized how difficult political reform is, and said, "Going for it is hell, and avoiding it is also hell." Toshio Yamaguchi, the secretary of the Watanabe faction, described Kaifu's situation "as if he is trying to hit a watermelon at a beach, blind-folded." It means that if Kaifu does not accomplish important tasks, one after another, he cannot strengthen the power of his administration.

One of the LDP leaders said that there cannot be earnest enthusiasm toward the political reform issue in the Kaifu

performance-oriented government. Kishi for the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, Sato for the reversion of Okinawa, Tanaka for regaining Japan-China diplomatic relations, and Ohira for general consumer tax reform issue risked their political lives.

No Intention To Risk His Own Life

Kaifu suggested strengthening regulation of political funds based on growing public opinion, although this is only to cover the party's weakness. The strategy of suggesting themes which the party dislikes is very similar to the Miki administration. This approach redoubled the opposition in the LDP.

"I am jealous of Kaifu because he has more than 50 percent of the public's support, and I cannot do anything about it. It must be a trend that an amateur like Kaifu is favored. But it is very similar to Miki for Kaifu to say that the LDP is always bullying him," (a leader of the LDP).

Ozawa left all decisons to Kaifu when he first learned the ESIC report. He considered Kaifu's situation and the LDP environment and said "depending on the prime minister's decision, I will do what he tells me to do with all my might."

However, in case electoral system reform is announced as a party decision, Ozawa will be the one who is going to be in charge of making adjustments inside and outside of the LDP. He will be in trouble if he does not emphasize the prime minister as a front-runner.

Kaifu, who repeatedly used the expression "conviction," was caught by a sarcastic remark from the opposition party at the National Assembly. Someone asked, "Does conviction mean not going backward, or does it mean that you won't go forward?"

As a politician's public pledge, the expression "conviction" is not regarded highly. It is used too often. The expression "risking the cabinet's life" used by Kaifu at the press conference sounded a bit more convincing. However, the most prestigious public pledge of all is "risking my political life."

"Koichi Hamada (the chairman of the Public Relations Committee) understood it very well and tried to make Kaifu say the words "risk my political life," but Kaifu was never tempted and did not utter the words," (a leader of the LDP).

If Kaifu declared, he would risk his political life, it would be an important reason behind a political change if the issue came to an impass. For Kaifu, the words are definitely taboo.

Kaifu announced that he wants to get the political reform plan by 29 November when the centennial commemoration ceremony of the parliamentary system is scheduled. Being in charge of politics during the commemoration symbolizes how lucky Kaifu is. Kaifu announced the schedule based upon his own political calculations.

On 12 November, there will be an Emperor Coronation Ceremony, and on the 22d, the *daisho* festival will be held. Offense and defense over the political reform issue will be postponed. After the commemoration ceremony is over, the movement toward reshuffling the cabinet may grow by December. Planning the 1991 budget starts in December. Those who are yearning to become cabinet members cannot oppose the political reform issue. If the schedule to adopt a political reform plan is confirmed in November, the Kaifu administration will be, at least, stable until December. An unexpectedly stable Kaifu administration will be guaranteed to be more stable, if political reform can be adopted by November, despite being once viewed as a weak administration.

Miyazawa, calmly predicting the future, told others: "Even if the plan is completed in November, and even if the plan is to be suggested at a regular session of the Diet, the start of discussions concerning the reform plan will be after next April, the budget blueprint will be set in April. You will not see the conclusion of the reform issue at a regular session of the Diet. It will be discussed at a special session of the Diet in the fall. But then fall will be the time for the election of the head of the LDP."

With the help from mass-communication media, the mood toward political reform will have grown by then. If Kaifu is going to be a flag holder of the reform, it will be very difficult to pull him down.

"If things go that far, Kaifu may be elected again," (a leader of the LDP).

Kaifu is hoping to announce the political reform plan in November, because it is his hope to be reelected next fall.

In addition to this aspect, there is another important meaning in a November time schedule. In October, a national census will be taken and the prompt result will be reported in December. Naturally, "a difference of one electoral vote" will be more significant by then. If so, under the "unlawful condition" section dissolution of the House of Representatives would be impossible. Kaifu will inevitably encounter a problem in his effort to dissolve the lower House.

The advantage of being in charge of the administration is to have the right to "affect the Diet members' survival as politicians." However, if this vital right is taken away, a weak administration would receive a fatal blow. In order to avoid Kaifu being driven into a corner, the political reform plan should be finalized by this time.

Thus, suddenly, the political reform issue, which is knitted closely with a strategy of maintaining Kaifu's political power, will become a most important political matter. The basic attitude of both the ruling party and the opposition party toward the reform issue is negative. However, Ozawa's positive attitude has encouraged others to think that political reform may be possible.

Ozawa originally considered introducing a small constituency system. His political mentor, former Prime Minister Tanaka failed in establishing a small constituency system during his administration.

Ozawa was motivated all the more by the fact that Takashi Hara, from his hometown, established such a system. Hara collected a huge political fund and made the Seiyu faction into an overwhelming majority, which became the foundation of today's political government.

The people around Ozawa regard him as follows: "Ozawa does understand how difficult the electoral system reform is. However, unlike Kanemaru and Takeshita, he seems to have changed his negative prediction toward political reform.

Way To Affect the Opposition Party

Ozawa would get a high historical evaluation as a politician, if he could make the reform come true. Both the Hatoyama and Tanaka administrations started the reform plan and failed. Even though it would be under Kaifu's administration, it would be clear to everyone that Ozawa's political power contributed to the accomplishment, not Kaifu's.

A veteran leader of the LDP predicted the future as follows, acknowledging Ozawa's thought: "Ozawa must have thought about the prospect that he would gain a distinguished political reputation, of course. But Ozawa is enthusiastic about the reform now because it will be a great way to affect the opposition parties. To view his action as a strategy to reshuffle the political world seems to be accurate."

The opposition parties are reacting subtly toward a small constituency system. Although the Japan Socialist Party (the JSP) does not accept the ESIC report at face value, the JSP's true intentions are hidden somewhere. Makoto Tanabe became a vice chairman of the JSP at the last meeting. He is one of those who set up the plan to reshuffle the political world.

Young Diet members of the JSP have told him to "accept the ESIC report. There is not much prospect that the Komeito and Democratic Socialist Party (the DSP) will tie up with us. Wouldn't it be smarter, in order for our party to gain political power, to accept the report, rather than dream about the unification of the opposition parties?"

Since Tanabe has professed publicly the intention to establish comradeship with other opposition parties, he cannot act in concert with his young party members. Moreover, since Doi, the chairwoman of the JSP, cannot make such an important decision, the JSP has announced no plans at all so far.

The LDP leaders said as follows: "Seven years ago, electoral reform of the House of Councillors came about because the LDP and the JSP tied the knot behind the scene. That method is still effective today. Let's go with the slogan "The LDP and the JSP electoral reform of the House of Representatives."

At last year's election for the House of Councillors, the JSP had a sweeping victory in small constituencies. The LDP leaders know that the combination of the small constituency system and the proportional representatives system is not bad for the JSP.

Redrawing Constituency Is Most Difficult

However, for the Komeito and the DSP, if things go as the ESIC reports, "It would be impossible for one DSP candidate to win in a small constituency," (a leader of the DSP).

Both the JSP and the DSP want to stop the reform at this stage. Both parties have said the marginal permissible line is either change the ratio of a small constituency and the number of the proportional representatives system from 6 to 4 to 5 to 5; or adopt both systems but make the proportional representatives system a first priority. (According to the result of the proportionate representatives system, the seat distribution will be decided. The winners of the small constituency and the people listed in the proportional representatives system will be named to the seats.)

The split between opposition parties is a great political opportunity for Ozawa.

"While making the JSP think that the LDP is going to tie up with the Komeito and the DSP, the LDP is threatening both the Komeito and DSP to organize the LD-Socialist Party. The opposition parties are quite suspicious and almost fearful of us," (a person around Ozawa).

Ozawa's strategy is to combine the electoral system reform and the promotion and defense of a consumer tax plan. Both the Komeito and DSP have reversed their firm opposition and now favor a consumer tax plan as suggested by the LDP. Both parties are willing to compromise with the LDP. Ozawa expects to get closer to both parties concerning the consumer tax plan if he yields to the electoral system reform plan. The reason Ozawa is so enthusiastic about political reform is hidden behind Ozawa's attitude toward the opposition parties.

Thus, Ozawa appears to be supporting the Kaifu administration and at the same time, he seems to be steadily preparing for reshuffling the political world. However, there is an anxiety factor as the concrete contents of the political reform plan are processed. That is just how much opposition there will be in the LDP.

The ESIC left the following issues untouched; the House of Councillors electoral reform, party codes, and redrawing small constituencies. Among those, redrawing a small constituency is the most difficult. The committee avoided discussing the issue, because "a member of the Ministry of Home Affairs is in charge of the matter and

he is working secretly on it. If the information leaks out, we will lose control over the redrawing issue," (a person related to the committee).

Concerning how to redraw a constituency, there are such criteria as not dividing a city, a ward, a town, or a village, and an average constituency should have a population of 400,000. However, in reality, one has to consider the geographical features and identification.

This cannot be done theoretically. "Depending on how you redraw a constituency, there will be many areas which will have a dramatic discrepancy in the ratio of the ruling party and the opposition parties; for example, from 5 to 5 to 7 to 3. If the redrawing plan is announced, neither Ozawa nor Kaifu will be able to control it,"(a veteran of the LDP).

The redrawing plan could be a vital factor in destablizing the political situation and disrupting it over night. Miyazawa can do nothing but remain quiet at this moment, but he said to the others that "the Kaifu administration is fragile. We should handle it carefully." (honorifics are omitted)

* Reform 'Most Important Issue' Facing Cabinet

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[Article by Tastumi Ito]

[Text] Despite Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu's "indomitable resolve" to see political and electoral system reform through, representatives from both the governing and opposition parties are, in a word, opposed to it. Is political reform really going anywhere?

Objections from Young Diet Members

From early in the morning of 11 May, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Headquarters was a scene of tension. Diet members with solemn expressions on their faces disappeared wordlessly into the elevator reserved for their use. Shortly before 8 AM a limousine carrying Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu arrived, led by police patrol cars.

On this day the first joint meeting of the LDP's political reform task force (headed by Masayoshi Ito) and Election System Investigation Council (chaired by Tsutomu Hata) was held starting from 8 AM at party headquarters. Prime Minister Kaifu (LDP president) attended after receiving a report from the government's Election System Investigation Council. The report, finalized 26 April, stressed that political reform required elections based on policies and parties (i.e., not personalities) and proposed introducing a system of small-constituency electoral districts and proportional representation. Specifically, it proposed that members be elected separately by small-constituency districts and by proportional vote, with 60 percent of the 501 members being chosen from the districts and 40 percent from the list. The higher proportion granted the districts was intended to foster a greater possibility of a change of administration.

Immediately after receiving the report, Prime Minister Kaifu said that the issue "must be taken up with indomitable resolve as the most important issue facing the cabinet." Prime Minister Kaifu also announced that he would take up the issue "as if the existence of the government were at stake." These remarks indicated more than the usual resolve to institute electoral system reform.

The joint meeting took place after an extended holiday, following Prime Minister Kaifu's meeting with the party's advisory group and tours of each factions' home territories and as part of efforts to shore up his position within the party. Some 165 members from both the Upper and Lower Houses of the Diet attended; including stand-ins, the number attending was about 200. Electoral system reform is the most important issue facing the Diet members and a most serious problem. To some members, their political careers are at stake. The unparalleled seriousness of the expressions on the faces of those members attending the joint meeting spoke more eloquently than anything else of the gravity of the issue.

"Making elections less expensive is a secondary issue," Kaifu said in opening the meeting. "The basis of political reform lies in making it so that elections can be conducted on the basis of issues and parties. I take seriously the duty entrusted to me by the age in which we live to lead the way toward such reform."

Thus Kaifu stressed the significance of electoral system reform. But the reaction of the Diet members was cool.

In response to a question, Kaifu stated that he would exert himself to ready a major reform bill in time for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Diet in November of this year, thus indicating that he intended to finalize the bill by this fall.

After Kaifu adjourned to his seat and the floor was opened to discussion, young Diet members rose to voice objections to the report and to the party executive. There was an element of vociferousness to the young members' criticisms of a report that, if implemented, could cause them to lose their standing as members of the Diet; these were those who had just gotten elected after spending large amounts of money and time under the present system of medium-sized constituencies.

"There are evils attached to the medium-sized constituency system, but I wonder if it is really entirely bad," said Toshikatsu Matsuoka, a member of the Abe faction serving his first term as a representative from Kumamoto's first district. "I don't think the issue has been fully discussed yet."

"Our political lives depend on how the districts are drawn," said Yoshtaka Murata, a member of the Miyazawa faction serving his first term as a representative from Okayama's second district. "I'm dissatisfied

that I am being told what will happen, just as if the matter had already been decided. There are still many opinions on the issue."

"Prime Minister Kaifu says that our fates hang in the balance, but it will be possible to implement electoral reform only if he makes clear where responsibility lies for failure to implement such reform, should that happen," said Teruhiko Mashiko of the Abe faction, elected for the first time as a representative of Fukushima's first district.

"It's true that there is no debate on policies under the present electoral system, but that's the fault of the opposition parties," said Shinko Ishihara of the Abe faction, elected for the first time as a representative of Tokyo's fourth district. "The idea of introducing both proportional representation and small constituencies looks more like the product of compromise than any reflection of the will of the people."

"You've said that you'll leave the drawing of the boundaries of the small constituencies to a neutral third party, but I cannot place my career in the hands of someone who isn't familiar with the situation," said Takushi Kato of the Abe faction, elected for the third time as a representative from Saitama's third district.

"Under an electoral system that centers on parties, what are we going to do about voters' decision to entrust their affairs to a particular individual?" asked Koji Omi of the Abe faction, elected for the third time as a representative from Gumma's first district. "Also, that there has been no change in the party in power is not a fault of the system but of the opposition; they could accomplish such a change if they would try. There is no chance for a serious discussion of the issue when it comes time to put together the general outlines of a major political reform package under adverse conditions. I, myself, was told by the party leadership to simply keep quiet, because in any case no reform would actually be implemented, but that the party could not contest the next election without saying something about political reform. The whole package was put together without any real debate. I want to debate the issue from scratch."

"Countries in which the small-constituency system is a success are countries in which power is shared with the localities," said Hiroshi Yamamoto of the Abe faction, elected for the first time as a representative of Fukui Prefecture as a whole. "If you introduce the small-constituency system at a stage at which local autonomy is not firmly established, the resources and money of the localities will go to a limited number of people, whose power will not diminish but expand."

"A small-constituency system will mean a decrease in the number of representatives from remote areas," said Shigeyo Fuwa of the Watanabe faction, elected for the first time as a representative of the entire Prefecture of Tottori. "Moreover, I don't think the introduction of the small-constituency system will eliminate the lack of credibility that politics has with the people."

A Variety of Criticism of the Report

It is a fact that the young Diet members do not yet have strong local bases of support, do not have strong affiliations with members of their prefectural assemblies and do not have much influence with the local party organizations. Given this situation, what is likely to happen if the dual small-constituency/proportional representation system proposed by the report is instituted?

Although it depends on whether the party endorsements are decided centrally or by the local party organizations, in either case, the younger members stand virtually no chance of winning such endorsements over well-known, veteran members who have been elected a number of times. The latter have a lot of influence with both the party and the local organizations. Even if younger members were to receive the party's endorsement, there is still the possibility that they may be placed in unfamiliar districts unrelated to the local bases of support they had so tirelessly nurtured up to that point. In sum, there is the fear that the powerful within the present electoral districts would be favored by such a change.

"The efforts we've made to get elected would all go for naught if the electoral system changes," said a young representative of the Takeshita faction.

Also, young members worry about ceding absolute control over the issue of who could become a candidate to the central party organization.

"It is my honest feeling that younger members, who do not yet yield much influence within the party, would never receive the party's endorsements to run," said a young representative from the Abe faction.

How will the party convince the younger members to go along with the plan? That will be the first hurdle that intra-party adjustment will face.

LDP Political Reform Group and Political Ethics Committee Acting Chairman Yoshiyuki Higashiya, elected to a fifth term representing Kumamoto's second district and a member of the Miyazawa faction, sees the matter thus:

"I think that those veteran Diet members with power must take into consideration the position of the younger members, or else they won't be able to institute any reform. I don't think they will be able to calm the fears of the young members unless they can go to them and say, 'Look, we, too, will be victimized by the change, so you'll have to bear with it.'"

Opposition to the report among younger members within the party is deeply rooted. Only 16 of the 120 present actually voiced an opinion, but of these only one said anything even remotely favorable about the report.

"I think that the distinctive thing about a Lower House representative is that he (she) is the representative of a locality," said Jin Murata, in his second term as a representative of Nagano's second district and a member of the Takeshita faction. "I think that the purpose of the

Lower House is to let local representatives have their opinions, with the end result being a sense of the national interest. I have doubts about introducing proportional representation into the Lower House. Also, what would happen if the small-constituency system were introduced into Japan as it is now? I think what would probably happen would be that political parties like the Japan Democratic Socialist Party, Komeito and the Japan Communist Party wouldn't be able to get any seats. There are societal interests represented by these parties. I have real doubts that a system that would crush them is a good one.

"Next, to what extent could the present geopolitical and geographical factors really be grafted onto the small-constituency system if one were instituted? If you're going to institute the small-constituency system, you're going to have to make the whole system a small-constituency one from top to bottom, including the prefectural assemblies. That brings us to how the districts are to be drawn. In the United States, they register those who want to vote and who want to participate in an election. I think that sort of thing would be necessary in Japan as well. The big cities have a large population but poor voter participation. The countryside, by contrast, has a small population but a high rate of voter participation. People in the countryside expect more from politics. I have doubts about simply apportioning the districts according to population."

Small-Constituency System Unsuitable for Japan

The younger representatives are not the only ones within the LDP who oppose the dual small-constituency/proportional representation plan. Criticism of the report can also be heard from powerful members with cabinet experience. Junichiro Koizumi, a former minister of health and welfare serving his seventh term as a representative of Kanagawa's second district and a member of the Abe faction, is one of those opposing the report.

"In the first place, I don't think the small-constituency system in itself will bring about a two-party system, politics based on policies and an end to elections costing enormous amounts of money," he says. "As for proportional representation, it, too, is criticized in its present form in the Upper House, where they're thinking of changing it on the national district level into blocks.

"But in the end, it is people who make politics. If the intention is to make parties and not personalities the center of political attention, then that can be accomplished with a little management to make the parties stronger. A person's appearance, his individuality, his personality as a politician are taken seriously in the world of politics. Just as there is an expression signifying politics centered on personalities, so, too, do I think that is one criteria of judgement (on the part of the voters) that is hard to eradicate and should be respected.

"'The parties are good, policies should be the center of scrutiny,' they say, but I doubt that's really a true possibility. Do you really think that the U.S. system of single member representation of small constituencies is a system based on debate of issues and policies? It is no doubt true that there is an element of party importance in it. But when you come right down to it, it's an election of personalities, whether they're Democrats or Republicans. Only every now and then do these elections develop into contests between parties and policies.

"It is an utter lie to say that elections will be conducted without money under the proposed system. Even in a one-on-one contest, such as an election for the head of a township, there are times—depending on who the candidates are—when large amounts of money are spent in these campaigns, and in these cases the districts are quite small. It's just not true that small constituencies mean an end to monied politics. And that goes for even an out-of-the-way place like Oshima, too.

"Unlike in England, in Japan elections even for city council or prefectural assembly involve multiple districts. It's going to be hard to draw the boundaries of the districts if only the Lower House is remade into small constituencies while the city councils and prefectural assemblies remain as they are; it will be even harder to draw the boundaries for 30,000-40,000 such districts."

Representative Koizumi was once an enthusiastic supporter of the small-constituency system. He is thoroughly familiar with the English small constituencies, having been an exchange student at the University of London. He has even proposed his own plan for introducing the small-constituency system. He continues:

"However, once I actually studied the situation, I came to the conclusion that the small-constituency system wouldn't work in Japan. Looking at the fight for party endorsements for city council, prefectural assembly and the Upper House of the Diet, I became painfully aware that such a system just wouldn't suit Japan.

"If the voting districts are broken down into small constituencies, you'll have three basic types—those that are bastions of support, those that are impossible to win, and those that are too close to call. In the case of the LDP, maybe about a third of the districts would be party strongholds. In such districts, those receiving the party's endorsement would run unopposed. Thus the getting of the party's endorsement would assume major importance, which would lead to internecine strife within the party. Such struggles would be played out in smoke-filled back rooms and might well invite the scorn of the people. In addition, the voters would lose the advantage of voting for people with different personalities from within the LDP.

"Those endorsed by the party in LDP districts would not willingly withdraw or retire, so it would be very difficult to bring younger members to the forefront. If that happens, a number of unendorsed candidates would enter the field and create a struggle between the conservatives; these struggles would not be over policies and issues but between personalities, between individuals."

Okuno's and Hayashi's Opinions

Former Home Affairs Minister Seisuke Okuno, a 10-term representative from Nara Prefecture who is not a member of any faction, advocates the introduction of a pure small-constituency system.

"The electoral system must be changed," he says. "But it's difficult to introduce such a system, given the current state of the political community. That's why the report's recommendations that 60 percent of the seats be apportioned via the small-constituency districts and 40 percent through proportional representation seems to me like a guess as to what would be an appropriate formula.

"But the electoral system as a whole is based on the Constitution, which stipulates different electoral systems for the Lower House and the Upper House. When a general election is conducted, the cabinet resigns and the Lower House chooses a new prime minister. In short, an election for the Lower House is an election to decide who will be the next prime minister. That being the case, the small-constituency system is the best one for what amounts to choosing a particular person.

"If you choose a political party, then because it is people who run the parties you don't know if the parties will change their policies. The JSP [Japan Socialist Party] in particular is a case in point; it's said to be "the two-party party." A vote for the JSP has no way of indicating the voter's preference for the party's right wing and right-wing platform or its left wing.

"That's why I think a pure small-constituency system is best—it amounts to choosing a party by choosing an individual. If you want to retain the small parties and their opinions, then let the Upper House—we have a bicameral legislature in Japan—absorb them. I think that there should be an electoral system worthy of an election to choose the prime minister, which is the election to the Lower House."

Yoshiro Hayashi, an eight-term representative from Yamaguchi's second district (Miyazawa faction) and a former minister of health and welfare who ran for the party presidency, has urged political reform. Yet while stressing the need for that reform he attaches these conditions to it:

"Political reform is not about what to do with the electoral system we have now. It's about changing the political system of Japan as a whole as we approach the centennial of the opening of the Diet, and I think that for that reason it is a major task. I think the electoral system is a problem that touches on the basic question of in what form Japan's future political system will ask the people for their opinions. I suppose a simple small-constituency system is one way to go.

"As for the parallel implementation of the small-constituency and proportional representation systems, the logical question is, how far will it be accepted? With a system of proportional representation especially, one must vote a party. I think the parties should take on a higher profile because there are always two or three different opinions about the way politics should be organized. In order to bring that about we probably have to fight it out among ourselves. If we do not talk about whether or not we can at present remake the political parties along these clear, policy-oriented lines, then I don't think there's much value in implementing proportional representation. I think that political thought, political ideas, have to be established through debate.

"If there are two, three or even four different ideas about how to make clear to the people the direction politics in Japan should take, then I think these ideas should remain clearly defined and separate. For example, I don't think that there is a possibility that those political forces aiming at the establishment of a basically socialist or communist society will merge into a single force in the late 20th and early 21st centuries? Or do those liberal-minded parties then fight it out? If there are clearly defined ideas at stake, then I think proportional representation can succeed. But I really wonder if such clear lines can be established at this stage."

Though a minority, there are those within the LDP who favor the report's recommendations. Toshio Yamaguchi, the secretary general of the Watanabe faction and a former minister of labor serving his ninth term representing Saitama's second district, is one of those who favor the report.

"I don't think the medium-sized constituency system is a bad one. I don't think the small-constituency system is perfect and the medium-sized constituency system a pale second. But I do think that politicians have to prepare themselves, exert themselves and study hard in order to perform well in all situations. I am opposed to the simplistic argument that opposes changes to the electoral system on the grounds that those who have been elected will lose their rights and interests. I favor the report in the sense that we must try our hand at the small-constituency/proportional representation system if it really is in keeping with the spirit of the times or has the support of the people."

Within the LDP, there is a sense that political reform is favored but reform of the electoral system is not. The LDP political reform task force has scheduled six weekly meetings between 18 May and 22 June. But it has no plans to prepare a proposal.

"There are a lot of younger representatives who are presaging a bloodbath if a poor plan is ordered instituted," says a source close to the LDP. "They're adamant because their political lives are at stake. The feeling there is against this kind of reform."

Among those within the LDP opposed to the report there was even a touch a "murder" in the air.

The Opposition's Response

The opposition parties, on the other hand, are directly opposed to the report. Miki Sato, serving his eighth term representing Aichi's third district and a member of the

Hori-Muto Group, is chairman of the JSP's election committee. The JSP is the largest opposition party, and Sato criticized the report.

"It can only be said that this plan is electoral reform of the LDP, for the LDP and by the LDP.

"That is, it was the LDP that was involved in the Recruit scandal and the Lockheed scandal. I feel that the LDP is trying to escape from its inability to contain these scandals by reforming the electoral system. The content of the report basically parallels the main outline of the LDP's electoral reform package, so I wonder if the council isn't being used to legitimize the LDP's plan. Despite what is now called an age of coalition and alliance between the political parties, I cannot condone a system that would eliminate the second- and third-largest opposition parties. The model we are studying is a system based on proportional representation as it is practiced in West Germany."

But some politicians affiliated with the JSP's right wing are also in favor of the report. Masaho Hori and Sanji Muto, of the group of the same name to which Sato belongs, have praised the report.

Komeito (the second-largest opposition party), the JCP [Japan Communist Party] (the third-largest opposition party) and the DSP [Democratic Socialist Party] (the fourth-largest opposition party) are strongly opposed to the report. That is because they would literally become weak, small parties with not much chance of gaining seats in small constituencies if provisions like those proposed in the report were implemented.

Kazuo Fushiki, chairman of Komeito's Special Committee on Political Reform who is serving his ninth term as a representative of Kanagawa's first district, criticized the council's report.

"This report is a fairy-tale treatment of the small-constituency system. I think it is nothing other than a means for the LDP to create its own long-term single-party system. It clearly intends to do away with the small parties, so I cannot accept it. Actually, we wonder why the LDP is so concerned with political reform at this time. Public opinion demanded clean politics as politics and money came to be considered the biggest problems with this system. I think that real political reform involves having the politicians bring about clean politics with a sense of purpose.

"At any rate, the idea that we should throw everything out, that the present system is entirely bad, is wrong from the start. It's up to the people to decide whether they want a two-party system of coalition government or a single-party government. The council vastly exceeds its authority when it declares that the country needs a two-party system. We think the West German system is a good one and are studying it."

Both the JSP and Komeito are apparently ready to enter into talks with the LDP if a joint small-constituency/proportional representation system is proposed.

The JCP is strongly opposed to the report.

"The report answers to the interests and strategies of the LDP," declares Secretariat Head Mitsuhiro Kaneko, who is serving his fifth term representing Tokyo's eighth district. "If such a plan is implemented, a system will be established that may allow the LDP to make its single-party monopoly a permanent one."

The DSP's Tatsuo Kawabata, a second-term representative from Shiga Prefecture, also criticized the report.

"I think that, in the end, the Election System Council itself cannot escape the criticism that it has an unrealistic view of the goodness of the small-constituency system. It pretends that the medium-sized constituency system is all bad, is "the criminal," and that the institution of the small-constituency system will cure the evils of expensive elections, abuse of power and a lack of turnover.

"The most important element in the report is a proposal to introduce the two systems—small constituencies and proportional representation—in a parallel manner. Basically, I think the small-constituency system is the main point, though. Its biggest problem is that a party getting 30 percent of the votes can get 80 percent of the seats. It's a system that overwhelmingly favors the big political parties. I cannot believe that a system that automatically excludes all but the two largest political parties is really what the people want.

"I do think that the small-constituency system is a system that can function as an arena in which the two biggest parties, which have the same basic positions on things like defense and foreign policy, can fight it out over the issues. But Japan is not ready for that now."

The Future of the Kaifu Administration

In addition to the opposition parties' opposition, antagonism to the plan within the LDP itself is stronger than the leadership had expected. It will therefore be difficult for the leadership to complete a proposal in time for the centennial of the founding of the Diet this November. Over half of those within the LDP do not think electoral reform can be effected with ease.

However, during the last election the LDP pledged to honor the report of the Electoral System Commission to the greatest extent possible, and to execute its recommendations. It will be Kaifu's fault if those recommendations cannot be executed, for he has staked the existence of his government on carrying out the plan. How will electoral system reform fare and what will be the fate of the Kaifu administration?

Says a member of the Abe faction leadership: "In the end, the reform plan will probably become a second 'consumption tax.' Or the LDP will try to introduce a bill that the

opposition will oppose and the LDP will give up on it before it becomes an issue like the tax. At that point, the question of Kaifu's responsibility arises. He might resign, or he might acknowledge opposition to the report within the LDP and scrap the plan, thus gaining the support of the party and prolonging the life of his administration."

Most of the people close to the LDP and to the opposition parties really feel that electoral system reform is an impossibility. It is a fact that although the LDP has an absolute majority in the Lower House, the opposition outnumbers it in the Upper House. It is hard to imagine the deep-rooted opposition to the report within the LDP changing easily into support for the plan.

It is the existence of LDP Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa, who is breathing down Kaifu's back, that nevertheless disposes the younger LDP representatives and both the DSP and Komeito parties to harbor fears about the report despite its slim chances of being implemented. For behind Ozawa stands former Deputy Prime Minister Shin Kanemaru. Kanemaru is closely connected to JSP Vice Chairman Makoto Tanabe. Within the context of the recent general election, Kanemaru raised the possibility of a "Great Coalition" of the LDP and the JSP and a major realignment of the political landscape.

"Ozawa's probably thinking that by putting forth plans to reform the political parties law and the electoral system, he can get the JSP to talk to him," says a source close to the Takeshita faction. "A change in this law could help the JSP, and no matter what their official position is, the JSP's leadership's true feelings can be expected to approve of such a change. Kanemaru's Great Coalition means changing the political landscape by reforming the electoral system and the party law. Tanabe may have joined the JSP executive, but he's still connected to Kanemaru and Ozawa."

So there is Ozawa, who is thought to harbor ambitions toward the party presidency and the premiership. With support from Kanemaru and Tanabe, he is fully capable of executing this most difficult move. But if electoral system reform ends in failure, then Ozawa, the standard-bearer of the reform, may well join Kaifu in political suicide.

* Proposals Result in Reform 'Stalemate'

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[Article by Muneichi Suzuki, staff writer]

[Text] The specific "election reform" proposals on district division and candidates have begun to be reported and there is a complete change in the situation. Strong opposition and a sense of displeasure swirled within the Liberal Democratic Party [LDP]. Veteran Diet members are strongly resisting a "switch of homes" to large metropolitan electoral districts. As anticipated, the reform suddenly is stalling as details are examined.

On 7 July, SANKEI SHIMBUN reported on the "District Division and Persons Scheduled To Stand For Candidacy" as an internal test proposal within the LDP concerning the nationwide 301 House of Representatives small electoral districts.

The details are very interesting. The young and middle-aged leaders keep close to the same electoral district as before, while veteran Diet members are shifted to large metropolitan districts with a shortage of candidates. This also includes those transferred to proportional districts.

Shin Kanemaru (Yamanashi) has the Kanagawa 1st Electoral District, Tsutomu Hata (Nagano) has the Kanagawa 4th Electoral District, Masayoshi Ito (Fukushima) has the Tokyo 8th District, Keizo Obuchi (Gumma) has the Tokyo 18th Electoral District, Kichiro Tazawa (Aomori) has the Saitama 4th Electoral District. Furthermore, Hajime Tamura (Mie) has the Aichi 5th Electoral District, Kiichi Miyazawa (Hiroshima) has the Osaka 13th Electoral District, and Shintaro Abe (Yamaguchi) has the Osaka 14th Electoral District.

However, former Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita has the Shimane 2d Electoral District, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu has the Aichi 13th Electoral District, and Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa has the Iwate 3d Electoral District, craftily remaining placed in the vicinity of their previous electoral district.

This report has caused great changes. A Diet Report Meeting was held in the electoral districts after the end of the special session of the Diet, and the Diet members were questioned at these meetings as follows:

"Do you intend to abandon this electoral district and us?"

To this, the Diet member would respond, "No, that was a private proposal of a university assistant professor. It is not an LDP proposal."

Or, a public pledge was made that "No, such a thing absolutely would not happen. I cannot abandon the electoral district and everyone. I wager my flesh and blood that this proposal will be crushed."

Also, depending on the Diet member, there is a shrewd move at electoral district meetings to say that "I will become the only party endorsement in this area. My rival, so-and-so, will move to another electoral district."

Trouble is occurring here and there.

Also, making the rounds of Nagatacho (Japanese Capitol Hill) is the episode where Shin Kanemaru closely questioned Noboru Takeshita, "Why am I in Kanagawa and you remain in Shimane? What is the reason?"

And Takeshita replied, "Though asked that, I don't know."

Having brought his lineage expressly to Yamanashi, Kanemaru's sense of displeasure can be understood at

his electoral district becoming a "swatch of homes" to the Yokohama City Naka, Isogo, and Kanazawa wards.

Inquiries poured into party headquarters.

"Is that really an internal test proposal of the LDP?"

For this reason, the following document was sent on 13 July to all Diet members and secretaries general of the urban and rural prefectures in the names of three people, Masayoshi Ito, director of the LDP Political Reform Headquarters, Masaharu Gotoda, deputy director of the LDP Political Reform Headquarters, and Tsutomu Hata, chair of the Election System Investigation Council.

"The other day, an article appeared in some newspapers that the party had prepared a 'test proposal' on the district division of small electoral districts and specific candidates to stand for election. However, this is based on a misunderstanding of the facts. It is not true that some organ within the party is preparing such a test proposal or that preparation of a test proposal has been commissioned to an outside consultant. It is conjectured that this test proposal was prepared by an outside scholar as a totally private work, but it is a clear fact that the party has not participated in this."

"Test Proposal" Follows Policy of Party Leadership

So, did the party headquarters participate at all in this "test proposal"?

A meeting of the Political Reform Task Force was held at the party headquarters on the morning of 15 June. Masayuki Fukuoka, an assistant professor at Komazawa University attended it as a speaker. At the center of this meeting were Tsutomu Hata, chair of the Election System Investigation Council, Joji Fukushima, chair of the Political Fund Committee, as well as Director Ito and Deputy Director Gotoda of the Political Reform Headquarters.

Fukuoka is a fervent promoter of the small election district proportional representation system and plan. Along with material explaining the necessity of reform, he brought a list of the 301 electoral district divisions and candidates anticipated to stand for election.

Fukuoka said to Fukushima, "I prepared this 'test proposal' in a week and had very little sleep."

Administrative authorities tried to distribute these materials at the meeting, but Gotoda stopped it.

"Real names appear in this. The pressure on the party will be too strong. Since the deliberation commission has not yet made district divisions, it will be a problem if the district divisions and names of candidates are distributed."

Thus, distribution of the material was stopped and Gotoda was surprised that a newspaper reporter that came to him that evening to get the news already had a copy of the list of candidates.

The material had leaked out of party headquarters and gone about on its own. In this age of copies and fax, the circumstances were that almost all of the Diet members had the material or had seen it at the point in time that it was carried in the SANKEI on 7 July.

The focus of the issue was that it was created based on the basic policy of Ito and Ichiro Ozawa, the leaders promoting reform, rather than whether or not the party headquarters had commissioned Fukuoka to prepare this "test proposal."

"The young and up-and-coming leaders are to be assigned to electoral districts, and the veterans and well known Diet members are no more that candidates standing for election in empty districts in big cities or listed on a block proportional name roster."

"The electoral districts of Diet members who have been elected eight times or been a minister more than twice should comply with the party decision."

These policies were mouthed several times by the leaders and those around them and Fukuoka did his work based on this outline. Consequently, the counter response within the party is that, "Though we don't go so far as to say it will be like this, isn't it a proposal that is on the right track and not far wrong?"

Then, it is very interesting that Diet members who saw this "concrete proposal" have developed a strong attachment for the existing medium-size electoral district system.

Seiroku Kajiyama was moved from North Ibaraki to the electoral district of Mito, but made this speech in the electoral district.

"Although they say Mito, I will not move. My hometown is Hitachi Ota."

Shintaro Abe half jokingly says to people he meets, "My electoral district is Osaka and is next to Masajuro Shiokawa."

Hirobumi Ito, a representative of Choshu who follows the trend of Nobusuke Kishi, was shifted to an alien electoral district in Osaka and takes the tone that it is stupid and beyond discussion.

When questioned that "even if you lose the election in Osaka, you will win by registering in a proportional district." He replies, "It's no joke. If a politician has his name written in an electoral district and wins, that itself becomes power."

More harsh is Hajime Tamura who turned over speakership in the House of Representatives to Yoshio Sakurauchi after the election.

"This is a strategy of Ichiro Ozawa. Ozawa has shifted those who have won election more times than himself to proportional districts and large cities, trying to reduce their power. In proportional districts, the first time you can win the election by ranking at the top, but the next

time the order on the name roster is lower, or they set up an age limit system and you probably will be out."

Moreover, Tamura points out this, "The electoral districts in big cities do not tend toward veterans. Speaking of the current Tokyo electoral districts, Shintaro Ishihara, Koji Kakizawa, and Takashi Kosugi are young, attractive, and energetic politicians who gained their Diet seats by walking their legs off. It is not something that Shin Kanemaru or I could do. Winning the election would be very doubtful."

Tamura speaks thus of his resolve. "Although I am old, this Hajime Tamura is not so frail as to let go of the Ise and Matsuzaka electoral district which he has nurtured for many years. If anyone is nominated with the LDP endorsement, I will confront him as an independent and have confidence I will defeat him. For this purpose, I have so far solidified support associations, brought benefits to the locality and nurtured a network. There are many colleagues who will not abandon their electoral district and fight as I will. If that bunch gets together and creates an independent party or new liberal democratic party, it probably will become a big force."

There is strong opposition to "switch of homes" and an attitude of head-on confrontation on the "election reforms" promoted by Secretary General Ozawa and others. If this situation comes to pass, the LDP will splinter and the main body probably will easily drop below a majority.

Based on these controversies, Akira Fukita said, "The problem lies in the establishment of proportional districts. It is supposed to be a debate on a small electoral district system or a medium-size electoral district system. I am an advocate of the medium-size electoral district system, but pure small electoral districts are satisfactory even if the Yamaguchi Prefecture apportionment for the House of Representatives goes from nine to seven. This has resulted because they have created a compromise bill establishing proportional districts as an expedient to secure passage in the Diet."

Furthermore, Joji Fukushima, who also is deputy director of the Political Reform Headquarters, sees the block system as a problem. "The deliberation commission report favors 11 block proportional districts, but blocks are impossible. That is because a ranking on the name roster cannot be made. For example, in Chugoku block there are Kiichi Miyazawa, Shintaro Abe, Noboru Takeshita, and Yoshio Sakurauchi.... Can a ranking be given to them? Even in the Hokuriku-Shinetsu block there are Keiwa Okuda, Yoshiro Mori, Tsutomu Kawara, Misoji Sakamoto, Tamisuke Watanuki, Wataru Hiraizumi, Tatsuo Ozawa, Takashi Sato, Tatsuo Murayama, Otomu Takatori, Tsutomu Hata, and Shunjiro Karazawa.... A ranking of them is close to impossible."

It is a sharp indication. Then Fukushima proposes, "Give up the block system for the sake of an election showing dignity and it is best for the name roster of proportional districts to be in units of urban and rural prefectures. Seek votes for political parties and allocate Diet seats decided for each party by totals nationwide. Each party decides allocation for each prefecture, but it is a proportional allocation by the number of votes obtained by prefecture. If it is by prefecture, those winning election in proportional districts will be respected as the prominent figures or elders of the prefecture. In Kumamoto, for example, the winners of the election in the five small electoral districts will have the image of platoon commanders and the winners in the proportional districts will be battalion commanders or division commanders because there is one prefecturewide winner."

Impossible For Politicians With No Hometown

This Fukushima test proposal is the revised draft of the deliberation commission, but the problem is that there is concern that various revised drafts will appear in addition to this and it will be like the emptying of "Pandora's box." Are the small electoral districts and the proportional districts parallel or joint forms? Is the ratio 6 to 4 or 5 to 5? Is the proportional district name roster indiscriminate nationwide, by block, or by each prefecture? There is fear that it will get out of control.

Amidst this situation, it is conspicuous that far from enthusiasm for reform within the party, there is an indifferent chill. Shin Kanemaru has said to those around him, "Shouldn't this be simple to do? Yet, it is a long time before an election and still it remains undecided."

Next, Kozo Watanabe, secretary general of the Keiseikai (Statesmanship Society), says, "It is impossible for politicians with no hometown. It is not only in Japan, but true in the United States also. Several specific proposals have appeared, but all of them are unreal. No one considers them seriously."

Sadatoshi Ozato, chair of the party Diet Affairs Commission points out, "There are a handful of earnest promoters of election reform and there are also a handful of those who oppose it out loud. The remaining 90 percent appear to say 'do you really want to do it?'"

Hideo Watanabe, chair of the party National Organization Committee has a stern view. "There is a plan to create a government proposal, pitch it to the LDP, and have a full-scale discussion within the party, but is a government proposal really possible? Points to note are that the opposition parties are opposed to a government proposal and how will that affect the LDP? However, we must have a correction of the apportionments. Won't the majority and minority parties enter discussions on this?"

Indeed, there are many difficulties in store. As Joji Fukushima says, there is great resistance even to promotion of a small electoral district system and there is a rigid wall to revision of apportionments to maintain the medium-size electoral district system.

"We are between the devil and the deep blue sea. Indeed, it is hell if we proceed and hell if we retreat."